



inside

- 4 **Outsourcing Marketing, Accounting and More**
- 6 **Trust a Professional Marketing Partner**
- 7 **Coaching Groups Improve Retention, Profits**
- 8 **Make Time to Evolve as a Leader**

Brokers, owners and managers are often required to be Jacks- or Jills-of-all-trades. You have to be an expert in your local real estate market and the company's ambassador. You must have superb sales skills and be able to teach them to agents. You are required to know technology, be a business strategist, a legal eagle and yet still keep on top of a mountain of daily paperwork.

Because you're in charge, it's really easy to get stuck thinking that you have no choice—you're responsible, so you have to do everything. That mindset hinders your professional development and the brokerage's progress and profit.

Take a step back and analyze. Remember that identifying and admitting your own weaknesses doesn't mean that you are a weak leader; it proves that you are dedicated to your brokerage. ■

This issue of *Management Issues & Trends* looks at how brokers, owners and managers can analyze their own skills and those of staff and agents, as well as how some owners and managers have strengthened their brokerages by relying on the skills of others. ■

Using Online Skills and Performance Assessment Tools

by Nancy M. Petersen

Have you ever had career counseling? Taken an aptitude test? Had a mentor? Do you know your Myers-Briggs type or DiSC Personality Profile? Can you use the phrase "skills set" in a sentence? (See the end of this article for *that* answer.) How about "human capital"?

The chances are pretty good that your answer to most of these questions is "no." That's because the average age of CRB Designees is 54 years and, as Boomers, we largely missed the boom in the field of human resource management. If you were "coming up" in your career between 1965 and 1985, the odds are that there was very little that was analytical or introspective about your career development. You needed a job, and you kept applying until you got one. You worked hard and moved up the ladder. If you had faults or weaknesses, you worked around them or hoped no one found them out. It sure wasn't cool to admit weaknesses.

In the past 20 years, however, there has been an explosion of knowledge about how people function in the workplace and what makes them tick. Human resource management has become a near-science, much more popular and significant than what it used to be called—personnel administration. The Society of Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org) in Alexandria, Va., reflects the profession's growth—in 1985, the organization had 35,000 members. Today it has 180,000. The shift in our economy from a manufac-

turing base to a service base also has made understanding how people work more important.

One of the reasons why personality typing, aptitude testing, coaching and team development have become so popular in the real estate industry in the last five years or so is because these concepts—somewhat old hat in the MBA and corporate world—sound new to those of us in our 40s and 50s who have not had the benefit of being formally trained in them.

The Internet also has made skills assessment, career planning and learning tools more accessible and affordable. You can take advantage of online diagnostic tools for under \$100. In addition, new tools are being developed specifically for the real estate industry that rely on successful track records in other fields, as well as offer a combination of online learning and face-to-face experience.

Presently, three online assessment tools are available to help residential real estate brokers, owners and managers assess their own strengths and weaknesses and those of their agents.

Focusing on Sales Skills

The CRB Council recently formed a strategic partnership with Peak Development LLC of Spearfish, S.D., to provide an online learning program for sales agents and brokers. As its name implies, RxSales



Using Online Skills and Performance Assessment Tools

Continued from Page 2

Expert Sales Performance System™ focuses on improving sales performance and sales management skills. The program is grounded in the belief that real estate sales has forever changed from a product-driven selling approach to advice-led selling.

How It Works

The RxSales system borrows terminology from health care to provide the structure for its instruction. For example, test-takers are compared to a “perfect specimen”—a composite of the attitudes, skills and best practices of sales professionals who excel at relationship selling.

RxSales begins with an assessment (The CheckUp™) which is designed to give the learner more insight into consultative selling skills, sales leadership ability and the potential for improvement in these areas. The online questionnaire contains 60 questions—45 of which assess consultative selling skills and 15 focus on sales leadership ability. You can see a sample of the questions by taking the online tour at www.rxsales.com. Once The CheckUp™ is completed, it’s analyzed and a detailed paper report, the “Laboratory Result”, is generated and sent via e-mail.

The test-taking process in itself is thought-provoking and does a good job of revealing strengths and weaknesses. For example, one question in the sales leadership section is posed this way:

If you are hiring a new salesperson and two lead candidates have good selling skills, what will be the tiebreaker in your mind? The one who ...

... has a more positive attitude?

... has more self-esteem?

... has more experience?

... or will be more loyal to the company?

The answer isn’t obvious. I was torn between “positive attitude” and “self-esteem.” I chose “positive attitude”

because—to me—“high self-esteem” is code for “pushy, aggressive salesperson.” But, my lab report says top sales managers identify high self-esteem as a key hiring ingredient, and it’s easy to see that my reluctance to hire a very assertive person might be a weakness if I were a sales manager. In addition to receiving individual analyses, a manager can also get a Group Diagnosis for his or her entire sales force.

To shore up weaknesses, participants in the RxSales system go through a program of blended learning—a combination of online instruction, called The Clinic, and face-to-face coaching from their sales coach.

Practical Implementation

How does a broker or manager decide to implement an assessment and training program? Linda Stimac of RxSales says, “The process of implementing a program like ours begins with a mindset to upgrade the talent bank and improve performance in a company. When a broker or owner makes that decision, he or she looks for tools to acquire, develop and retain agents. Most brokers also look for systems that are voluntary for agents and ones that agents can at least partially pay for. That keeps them invested.

“The most effective learning programs have the broker at the center of it. That means brokers and managers expect to be included in the program. That is so important because their agents need to learn from them, especially when so many have ‘healthy’ client-centered selling skills themselves. These brokers want to improve as sales leaders.

“Not every agent is right for a program such as RxSales. It is designed for agents who want to take their skills to a higher level. They must be willing to find out what’s holding them back and then work on those roadblocks.

“Often, a broker wants to do an assessment project for agents first, and then,

based on the results (Group Diagnosis), they elect to institute the learning program (The Clinic). After all, it doesn’t make much sense to diagnose something, find out there are early warning signs, and then decide not to correct them.”

The RxSales system has been tested and used by names familiar to *MI&T* readers. “My own CheckUp™ experience was fun and easy.” says **Laura W. Duggan, ABR, CRB, CRS, GRI**, president, West Austin Properties Inc., Austin, Texas. “I identified with everything. The CheckUp™ confirmed areas that I always felt intuitively were strengths, and it identified a few areas that could use some improvement for me to be truly at the top of my game. This is a great system for managers because it makes measurement objective.”

Jim Kinney, ABR, CRB, CRS, GRI, president and managing broker, Rubloff Residential Properties Chicago, says that having his associates take the CheckUp™ and then looking at The Group Diagnosis was invaluable for him.

“I learned exactly what was missing for each broker associate to achieve his or her highest potential. Now that I have the answers, I can do a better job of steering them in the right direction. Knowing more about their mindsets enabled me to address this directly so that today they are more accountable and feel better about themselves and their work,” he says.

More Extensive Feedback—A 360 View Sales performance and management is such a critical aspect of running a real estate brokerage, it’s a logical first place to concentrate. But you might want to drill down and examine other skills in your organization.

The latest trend in workplace performance analysis is called 360 feedback or full-circle appraisal. The name reflects the process. In a 360 assessment, feedback on an individual’s performance is provided by the

worker, his or her supervisors, peers, direct reports and sometimes suppliers and clients. The idea is to see yourself as others see you and from all angles.

A 360 assessment provides valuable information to both the individual and the organization. The individual receives feedback on areas needing development and a system to better manage his or her own performance and careers. The organization is provided with the information to improve recruiting, training, and career planning.

Recently Upward Motion, a Canadian company that has provided an online agent assessment and recruiting tool for real estate brokerages, merged with Alignmark Inc., of Maitland, Fla. The merger brings to real estate the same occupational behavioral health expertise that has been used in Fortune 1000 companies for years.

AlignMark (www.alignmark.com) is headed by Dr. Cabot Jaffee, president and CEO. He holds a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology.

Jaffee says that countless training dollars

are wasted every year because training initiatives are implemented based on assumptions rather than good data, and from the failure to measure the return on investment of training. His company offers diagnostic assessment tools, including online assessments, that evaluate job skills and developmental needs, then provides training to translate assessment results into concrete developmental action plans. AlignMark has three product offerings specifically tailored to managers: the AccuVision Supervisory and Managerial System, the AccuVision Training Series and Maximizing Individual Performance.

The AccuVision Supervisory and Managerial System is an assessment tool used to select new managers, identify strengths and weaknesses and kick-start a coaching, training and self-development program for managers. It is comprised of video simulations that depict realistic management situations and possible responses.

Responses are computer scored to give immediate results.

The AccuVision Training Series is aimed at improving the core competences of supervi-

sors and managers in both team-oriented and traditional work environments. It is made up of five, one-day training modules each focused on a critical management skill. The series employs a learning-by-doing approach to skill development and demonstrates critical skill behaviors by video-based modeling.

Maximizing Individual Performance trains managers and team-leaders to focus the work efforts of their direct reports and provide coaching to maximize results. The program can be conducted as six independent learning sessions that can be delivered in supercharged staff meetings or workshops or offered as a two-day seminar.

“Our products are a good fit for the real estate industry,” Dr. Jaffee says. “They are designed to improve the skills and performance of people who work in teams, have a high tolerance for risk and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. That’s the real estate business.” ■

Answer: “That’s not in my skill set.” Question: “What do people under 35 years of age say instead of ‘No, I don’t know how to do that.’?”

How Good Can an Agent Be?

The Real Estate Simulator, by Upward Motion Inc., has been a boon for brokers and managers because it can be used both as a recruiting and a training tool.

The Real Estate Simulator is a detailed (It takes almost 30 minutes to do the whole test), online test that uses video images to present life-like home-selling situations that the test-taker must choose how to handle. Some of the situations presented include door-knocking, determining what a buyer’s price real price-point is, and referreeing price differences when working with a married couple.

Brokers can offer the Real Estate Simulator on the brokerage’s Web site to attract potential applicants as well as to assess current agents. The process immediately alerts a broker or manager about an applicant’s results. An applicant takes the tests, submits it electronically to Upward Motion for scoring,

then results are forwarded to the broker or manager. When I completed the Real Estate Simulator on Cotton Real Estate’s Web site, www.cottonre.com, **Jack Cotton, CRB**, received my results and forwarded them to me within 12 hours. Cotton has used the Real Estate Simulator for more than two years. “I’ve hired four agents whom I first met because they contacted me online. The test accurately predicted that they would be top performers. Just as important, the test helps me weed out the poor prospects, so I am not spending too much time with people who aren’t likely to be successful.”

The Real Estate Simulator scores agents and prospective agents on three broad skills: sales ability (including building rapport and acquiring information, listening and comprehensive skills, managing the sales process, and closing skills), general cognitive ability, and personality characteristics (sociability, assertiveness, achievement, dependability, and emotional resilience).

Find more about the Real Estate Simulator at www.CRB.com.



Outsourcing Marketing, Accounting and More

by Miguel Berger, CRB, GRI

I am a bit of a rarity in the real estate business. Most broker-owners have a background in sales or in management. My background is a little different. It started like many others. In 1994, I was working as a salesperson, but then I discovered the Internet. I found my passion. Soon thereafter, I was managing a couple of offices and creating the whole technology plan for the entire company. I left my position and started a consulting firm for technology and real estate. I quickly realized that most brokerages didn't recognize the importance of technology to this industry's future. In October 2001, I decide to open my own brokerage and enjoy the fruits of my own understanding of what an important and profitable tool technology can be in the real estate industry. I knew my aptitude with technology would be a real advantage. I was right.

In a little more than three years, my brokerage has grown from just two people to 26 agents. With current figures, our gross sales volume this year should reach \$60 million. Technology skills have been a real asset, but I know that another key factor to this success is my willingness to let go. I hire other people who are experts in their field to do what they do best. I don't try to do it all.

Combining technology and my ability to delegate has led me to outsourcing key business functions and has helped to leverage the business. It has enabled us to accomplish a lot with a little. Perhaps because of my technology background, I am a real fan of virtual assistants and offsite specialists. I currently use three (one for the Web, one for marketing, one for accounting) and am interviewing for a fourth (for relocation). My initial reason for outsourcing was a simple one: Even though these specialists typically charge \$70 to \$100 per hour, they are the most cost-effective way to get what I needed done. (Note: most general VAs and free-

lancers don't charge this much—those that are just beginning can be much cheaper—but they don't have the skills you seek.)

When I first opened, I needed to make an impact in my market area, but I couldn't afford a local public relations or marketing firm. Virtual assistants were just beginning to make their mark in the industry, and I was comfortable with the idea. To be happy using virtual assistants, you can't be a micro-manager; you have to see the "big picture". I don't like to be managing people all the time. I don't want to work with people who need hand-holding. I prefer that they have their own initiative. I look for people who will understand my thinking, get the task down and deliver on time.

When I first opened, I needed a company brochure, a customized quarterly newsletter and a continuously updated Web site. So I looked for a virtual assistant with a good marketing background. I believe in specialists. I don't buy the line that one person can do it all. I know I can't!

I quickly discovered that a good virtual assistant brings many advantages to the table, in addition to lower-than-conventional cost.

Opportunity to try them out. Right off the bat, the first benefit is that you can try out a virtual assistant on a small project and see how it works. When you think about the amount of time you spend interviewing employees, training them, and trying to make a go of it when they don't first work out, the little-or-no initial commitment is a huge plus.

Minimizing management time. While some people might miss the interaction and give-and-take of having someone in the office, I don't. In fact, I appreciate the fact that outsourcing my projects forces efficiency and reduces inefficiencies. When someone is being paid by the hour and only gets paid when the job is done, they

develop the skill of managing you. My marketing specialist chases me down, gently hounds me for information when needed, keeps me on track and helps me meet deadlines. By the same token, we don't waste any time chit-chatting over the water cooler.



Miguel Berger, CRB

Availability and flexibility. A virtual assistant can extend your day and improve your productivity, giving you greater availability and flexibility. I'm on the East Coast but my Web specialist is on the West Coast. That means if I am working on a transaction in the evenings, she's still within her normal working hours.

Many independent specialists are also flexible. Once, a reporter called me after 5 p.m. asking for a TV interview the next morning. I needed to pull together some facts about the company quickly. All it took was one phone call to my marketing specialist (she gave me her private number for just such situations and opportunities) and two and a half hours later the reporter had what he needed even though it was close to 9 p.m.

Protection from competitors. By using a VA who is across the country, I protect my intellectual assets, my ideas. I don't want my agents or staff to be lured away by a competitor, and I know no matter how loyal someone is, more money is a great enticement. When key staff go, one's ideas go with them. And that's not good when they are just going across the street to another brokerage. Professional outsourcing specialists will not accept assignments from competitive clients—in real estate, that's usually a geographic proximity issue—they consider it a conflict of interest.

A broader perspective. On the other hand, when you deal with a good VA, he or she can bring ideas to you based on experiences in working with other clients, both in and out of real estate. This is a huge benefit. I get ideas from California, Hawaii, all over. I appreciate knowing what's going on in other parts of the country and certainly don't mind my ideas being shared there.

Currently, I continue to outsource marketing, including creation of company brochures, our quarterly printed newsletter and Web site updating and maintenance. I now count my accountant as a virtual accountant since we never meet; we just e-mail files back and forth or post them on the accountant's Web site. He prepares payroll and quarterly taxes, reviews our QuickBooks files every quarter and prepares tax returns. Until recently, I had a third VA handling relocation tasks. But she simply didn't have the drive and initiative to be truly virtual so we parted company. That's easier too when the relationship is virtual! I currently am searching for a replacement.

With outsourcing specialists and virtual assistants on my team, I can relax a little more. I can focus on what's at hand, knowing that they are working for my benefit and that will call me when they need additional information, have a brilliant idea or see an opportunity that would benefit me. It's like having my marketing department, my Internet management group, my financial officer and my relocation expert in another office. They aren't underfoot; they don't use my resources or require considerations for expanding my physical plant. They do promote my business, keep my approach fresh and help me to stay on track with the projects I define as priority. And, they are always a phone call or an e-mail away. ■

How to Select an Offsite Provider

Always require and check references. Check every single one.

Don't hire a generalist. Outsourcing specialists are a benefit to your company only if they bring the specific skills you need. You can hire generalists for onsite work or use temp agencies as needed for general or clerical work.

Hire people who work full-time. Part-timers only dedicate a few hours a day or a week to your needs, and you will split that with any other clients they may have.

Get information. Ask about background and real-life experience in the areas you need and a history of delivering those services via digital means. Consider and weigh formal education, professional experience, longevity in business and client references. Check into the certification requirements if you seek certified individuals.

Recognize that you get what you pay for. Rates will vary, but your end cost is what matters. Recognize that specialists may accomplish in 15 minutes what it could take two hours or more for a beginner to accomplish—and the pros will deliver a better end product.

Do they seem too eager? If so, you may not want them. Hungry often = new or less than experienced. Sometimes you strike gold with a wonderfully experienced newcomer, but often your projects are merely their training ground.

Do they interview YOU? Most professional providers will. If they aren't asking questions to help you define how you see their role in your business, you should be concerned. Excellent outsourcing providers ask excellent questions.

Do they educate you about this way of working? If you are new to outsourcing, most professionals will take a few minutes to ascertain your level of comfort and will help to explain to you how it works, and how they (or someone they recommend) may help you.

Are they busy? Most professional providers of a certain caliber have a full client load. You know the old saying, "If you want something done, ask the person who is busy" -- not the one just standing there. They accept only the "cream-of-the-crop" new clients — and only those they believe they can help.

Don't be offended if you are referred on. Most professionals will send you to another provider if they don't have the time in their schedule or if they don't have the specialized services they feel you need. Professional referrals will help you find a good match. Someone in this business is careful about referring work to others. It puts their own reputation on the line. Not every referral is a perfect match, but your chances are improved when a professional outsourcing specialists makes a recommendation.

Source: www.remoteprofessionals.com



Trust a Professional Marketing Partner

by Greg Herder, CRB

In retrospect, Michael Sharp, CRB, admits he was nervous. He invested more than \$20,000 on the creation, photography and printing of his marketing materials, and then crossed his fingers hoping his marketing campaign would work. Six months later, he found himself wishing he had spent even more.

Michael Sharp, CRB

Sharp's six-month journey from also-ran to dominant player in the downtown Minneapolis market demonstrates the power of marketing. Using a consistent barrage of mailings anchored by an award-winning, full-color brochure, Sharp infiltrated a market that had previously been dominated by two longtime agents. Today, there's a different environment in the downtown marketplace.

"I walked into a building one day to meet a seller and the office manager came up to me and said, 'Your materials are the talk of the building,'" Sharp says.

When Sharp came to Hobbs/Herder, he had been doing some marketing, but he was also making mistakes. First of all, his materials, while relatively high-quality, were very business-focused and therefore failed to elicit an emotional response. Secondly, he didn't know when or where to mail his materials, and the resulting lack of consistency in his campaign hurt him.

Many agents and brokers have become very skilled at designing their own promotional materials or having someone in their brokerage do it for them. New printing technology makes it fast and affordable to print promotional pieces.

But that still doesn't mean you should be doing it yourself. Many times an experienced professional can uncover the flaws in what you have been doing or tweak an

existing program to make it dramatically more effective. Upon receiving Sharp's existing materials, we analyzed the content and theme, and decided mutually with Sharp that we'd maintain the concept ("Giving You the Edge") while infusing emotion into the content. We created a brochure, a full-color postcard, a houseflyer master, a logo and stationery package and a Web site that focused on Sharp's driven personality.

A conscious decision was made to connect with prospects by telling a story from Sharp's youth, recalling days spent helping his parents with their "fixer-uppers." This provided emotional depth and also positioned Sharp as a longtime Minneapolis resident who possesses the in-depth local knowledge that allows him to compete in his market.

Stick to the Plan

Sharp was a good partner in developing these materials, trusting our experience and letting us do what we do best. Once he

A consistent marketing campaign developed by professionals can create a presence for you in the community.

received the draft of his brochure, he was extremely responsive. He also contracted with a well-known Minneapolis photographer who shot terrific photos that helped create the buzz about his materials.

Sharp launched his mail campaign in September. The timing was deliberately designed to strengthen the following Spring selling season. But the response from consumers was quick.

"It only took until December before we started seeing results," Sharp says. "Then we had a record month in December, and it

hasn't stopped. By the end of February, I was already a month ahead of where I was the previous year. By the end of March, I had recouped my entire \$20,000 investment, including design, photography, printing, everything."

A Familiar Face

Since launching the initial campaign, Sharp's discipline in following the mailing plan and his belief in good, sound marketing principles, Sharp has paid off. "People say, 'We were thinking about selling and your postcard showed up,'" he says. "The consistent mailing plan reinforces that they don't forget about us. It's really changed our business."

Sharp also noticed strange phenomenon as the result of his marketing campaign.

"What else is so great is that people recognize me before I meet them. That's a great feeling. A few people have even told me that they've been getting my materials for years. I just say, 'Oh, great.'" That's the perception a high-quality campaign can create in the consumers' minds. And in marketing, perception is reality.

Taking It to the Next Level

So what's next for Michael? In the coming year, he plans to delve into e-mail farming, which should drive even more traffic to his Web site and produce more leads, as well as increasing his current mail database to 2,000 names by adding several buildings to his farm.

And his advice for those on the outside looking in? "If you really want to grow your business, this is the way to do it. And once you start, stick with it, that's the key," he says. ■

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Coaching Groups Improve Retention, Profits

by Judy LaDeur

One of the best ways to insure agents' success is through weekly coaching. Not only does it insure their success, but it is part of a very strategic plan designed to complement your recruiting efforts, increase your retention and enhance your profitability.

But it can be difficult for managers and brokers to devote the time it takes to individually coach agents. In addition, perhaps selling isn't your strength or maybe you've been away from it too long. Is there another way to effectively coach agents besides one-on-one sessions? You bet there is. You can set up coaching groups. They will make your agents stronger and solve some of your problems too.

Let's start with the issues facing managers and brokers today:

- It seems tougher to keep the agents we have.
- Recruiting experienced agents seems to be a greater challenge.
- With increase splits and the cost of maintaining systems and an office that is "high-tech" and "leading edge" profits are dwindling.
- Many franchises and corporations are closing training centers, and placing the responsibility of training on the owners and managers.
- It takes 3 to 6 months from the time the phone rings until the new agent is actually in your office. It takes another six months of time and training to get them productive. And yet 50% to 70% of the new agents we hire will not make it and will leave the business or, worse, will not make it and stay in your office.

Sound familiar? Can you relate to any of the above scenarios? If you can, consider

implementing coaching and networking groups within your brokerage. Managers I know who have successfully implemented such groups can't believe how effectively this training and support technique addresses these issues. Plus they ease the burden of management for the broker, owner or manager.

My 20-year background in recruiting has taught me that any system that increases an agent's production can be used to recruit other agents. Plus, a system that increases an agent's production helps retention and of course increased production causes increased profits.

Coaching groups meet on a regular basis. They set goals, and they have assignments. There is an expectation of what they should do, and peer pressure if they don't.

What do agents like about coaching groups? They get to share their ideas. They learn from others who have already mastered techniques and dialog. It gives them a sense of self worth, and it keeps them on track.

Why do brokers and managers like coaching groups? Coaching groups save time. You can effectively coach an entire group of agents for an investment of one hour per week. Coaching groups save careers. Some agents just need more time and more direction. When they don't get it, they don't make it. Coaching groups are a recruiting magnet. Thousands of agents in every major marketplace are searching for someone who will take an interest in their success and their career. If your group is successful, and you market those results to "those agents" who need some help, they'll come. Top producers also need a forum where they too can exchange ideas and learn from others. And there is no preparation time needed on the broker's part.

The Formula

Here's how to start coaching groups in

your office.

1. *Participation in the group should be voluntary.* You can serve light refreshments if you would like. You should set goals for those who meet weekly, and hold them accountable to the activity necessary to hit those goals.
2. *Choose a convenient time that will not conflict with the agents' schedules.*
3. *You may set up more than one group.* Groups should be set up with agents of similar production and similar goals. For example, you could set up a group of agents in the business less than one year or with less than \$1 million in production. Their goal might be two units of production per month. You could also have a group that currently averages two units of production per month, with a goal of four



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*Coaching Groups Improve Retention. Profits
Continued from Page 7*

units per month. The agents in the first group, the beginners, could graduate to the next level by maintaining their production of two units a month for a specific period of time, such as four months. If you have a large group of top producers you could set up a coaching group for them as well. If you don't have a lot of top producers yet, you will.

Start with one group, and then 30-60 days later, start the second group.

1. *At the first meeting, discuss goals and give them the format for the session.* Let them know that you will be asking them to share their results with the group at the next session as a result of the information that they get that day.

2. *You act as a monitor, not a teacher.* As a monitor, you will ask each agent to share an idea and will keep the discussion moving. Only after the agents have shared their ideas, should you offer ideas of your own. Let them be the stars.

3. *Select a topic and announce it in advance so they are prepared.* It should be a very small, very specific topic that can be discussed in detail, such as how to overcome the objection of reducing your commission, how to stage a home for sale, what to say when you call a FSBO or how to set yourself apart from your competition. You can choose the first four to six topics and then let them begin to tell you what they need.

4. *Everybody participates.* Go around the group and ask each person what they do relevant to the topic. Let others ask questions, and then move onto the next agent. Make sure they all take notes, however, you may want to take notes yourself and then have them typed and distributed to those in the group. Your notes can also form the basis of a notebook of proven training techniques and ideas to share with new agents in the future.

5. *Hold them accountable.* You can go around the group and ask each participant

what their activity was and what their results were. If the goal is two units per month, they need one unit the first two weeks to be on track. If you just want your group to operate as a networking session, you do not have to ask their production each week, but you should always let them share their success at this session.

6. *Create fun incentives.* If your sessions are production oriented, invite anyone "On

Track" after the first quarter to participate in the On-Track Luncheon, your treat.

Coaching groups are a great way to bring more value to your agents and create more time for yourself. They are a true win-win deal. ■

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Make Time to Evolve as a Leader

by John Arquette, CRB

No matter how your position is specifically defined in your brokerage, however, fundamentally you are required to be a leader. I've always thought that the term "manager" when applied to people who run real estate offices is misleading. We're more than managers. It's our job to create a bright future in real estate for our branch, firm and agents. You've got to take charge, to tell people exactly what you expect.

Unfortunately, it's easy to get overwhelmed juggling the day-to-day operations of a brokerage and to lose sight of the vision.

I found that to stay inspired and to constantly and consistently work on the vision, I needed to get out of the office and be among my peers and colleagues in real estate. Attending industry educational events is not a luxury; it's essential to creativity and progress. I recently completed my CRB Designation and also hold the GRI designation. I am a student of the business reading books, magazines and any local paper when I travel trying to find a new spin on the business. I will attend the NAR convention once every two or three years and also plan at least one seminar per year. I am a believer in working "on" the business versus working "in" the business all of the time.

The networking opportunities that come

at conferences or seminars are very valuable. I have learned as much over a lunch with a colleague as I have in most classrooms. Actually having a conversation with some who does what you do but somewhere across the county can be very enlightening. They often offer a perspective you can't get in your own backyard.

Sometimes chatting with a colleague outside of the office puts things in crystal-clear focus and can make a big difference. For example, by networking I learned that other brokerages offered more clerical support to agents and demanded minimum production standards. I was a top producer in the firm for many years and found myself making copies at 10 p.m. way too often. I also became frustrated when working with a poorly trained low producer on the other side of a transaction. When I presented my idea of offering an unheard of level of support to agents and enforcing a minimum production standard, Phil Nothnagle was squarely behind it. Both are now the norm in our 21 branch offices. The idea seemed to be the natural evolution of the business, but as we know evolution leaves those who don't adapt behind. ■

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